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ABSTRACT

Residential treatment for alcohol/drug abuse may be a significant event in an adolescent's life. School counselors may further the experience by developing familiarity with available treatment programs. Having all available options at hand, a client or family can make a choice, thereby gaining an investment in the treatment decision. In order to help counselors guide families seeking information about residential treatment programs, this fact sheet lists questions to consider in several areas. Cost, Program Goals, Staff Credentials, Program Components, Aftercare, School-Related Education, Service Agreements, Relapse Programs, and Program Location are the sections covered. (MSF)

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Assessing Adolescent Treatment Programs

by Carolyn Hadge

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New Jersey Alcohol / Drug
RESOURCE CENTER AND CLEARINGHOUSE
Center of Alcohol Studies, Rutgers University

ASSESSING ADOLESCENT TREATMENT PROGRAMS

Carolyn Hadge, M.A., C.A.C.

As student assistance programs continue to develop, adolescent residential treatment becomes an increasingly-recommended option for alcohol/drug abusing students. Which program to choose and why to choose it are serious considerations for students and parents or guardians.

Visiting these programs offers counselors the opportunity to learn about the facility and to obtain a "sense" of the program. The counselor's acquaintance with the director and staff can be an asset in facilitating a positive experience. The time spent in developing rapport with treatment programs is time invested in a student's recovery progress.

Taking the time to become knowledgeable about all available programs allows a counselor a broad base of programs to offer families. By having program descriptions (brochures) and admission criteria available upon referral, the client and family members will have answers to their concerns. By having all available options at hand, a client or family can make a choice and have an investment in the treatment decision.

Aftercare services are crucial to adolescent treatment. In researching available facilities, it is imperative to investigate the complementary continuing care programs that are accessible to clients. The residential program is the beginning of a long process, and counselors have the role of orchestrating this process. The following questions are designed to help counselors guide families eliciting information about residential treatment programs, and what they may expect from these programs.

Cost

What insurance coverage does the facility accept? Does it cover 100% of the cost? Is there a cash down payment? What will the parent/ guardian have to pay? What does the coverage include: psychological testing,medical needs, family program, aftercare? Does the treatment center have state money for adolescent beds? Is there Division of Youth and Family Services coverage? Does the facility have indigent beds? Will the facility give "scholarships?" Who qualifies for these coverages? How long is the waiting list?

Although it is awkward to ask at onset if a family has insurance, it is necessary. The answer to this question immediately qualifies one's choices. A family should be forewarned of the costs that will be incurred. Unexpected bills will not only cause anxiety but will also impact on the counselor/ school / family relationship. If the school staff should recommend treatment, the school may be held responsible for payment; school staff should "suggest" treatment and carefully word any written evaluation.

Program Goals

Is abstinence an expected outcome? Does the program address the whole student, or does it focus on the chemical dependency? Does the staff refer related issues, e.g., dual diagnosis and eating disorders? Are the program expectations age-appropriate?

Does the program recognize and address cross-cultural issues? If your client is Black, Hispanic, Asian, will their ethnicity be considered a significant factor in recovering?

Staff Credentials

Is the program accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals (JCAH) and appropriate state agencies? How long has the director been in his/her position? How frequent is the staff turnover? Is there an age/sex/ethnic mix of staff? Is there a specific time criteria for recovering staff? What is the staff/client ratio?

Program Components

What is the criteria for admission? Is the program alcohol-specific or does it address all chemicals? Is there an in-house evaluation period available? How long is the length of stay and is it flexible? Is the program only for adolescents? If there are adult clients, how and when do they interact with the adolescents? Is detoxification an "as need" basis? What is the procedure for medical emergencies? Are the Twelve Step programs, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA), the foundation of the program? What is the perspective on addiction? Is there a religious orientation? Does the program integrate biochemical research?

What does the family program include? Are siblings involved? How frequently is there one-to-one counseling; group counseling? What is the daily program schedule? What happens on weekends? What is the policy on mail, phone calls, family visits, and non- family visitors? What are the patient demographics? What is the criteria for dismissal? How is patient alcohol/ drug use handled? How is sexual activity handled? What is the recreational program? Is it styled to

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meet the ability levels of all clients? Is it competitive or cooperative? Is it integrated with the counseling component? Does it enhance ongoing physical activity after treatment?Is there a recreational therapist? Is there a specific nutritional program and/or evaluation?

Aftercare
What type of aftercare program exists? Is it accessible for your client? How long does it continue? What is it's record for ongoing attendance? What issues does it address beyond chemical dependency?

School-Related Education
Does the program offer tutoring? Is there a teacher on staff who coordinates the tutoring? Will the tutoring program continue the student's current academic program? Will the student be graded and those grades available on discharge?

Service Agreements
How and when will the school referral be contacted? Is the treatment center open to developing a mutual and cooperative staff relationship?

Relapse
Is there a relapse program? Does it offer telephone assistance? Are there alumni activities?

Program Location
Is the traveling distance reasonable for the family? Will the distance enhance or inhibit the involvement of the family in the program?

Residential treatment may be a significant experience in an adolescent's life. The school counselor, in turn, may enhance the experience by developing a familiarity with and understanding of available treatment programs.

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